

Proper Nomenclature for the Human Granulocytic Ehrlichiosis Agent

To the Editor: In their recent article, "Antigenic variations in vector-borne pathogens," Barbour and Restrepo discuss the outer membrane protein components of *Anaplasma marginale* and related bacteria (1). Citing a reference by Zhi et al. (2), they state that *Ehrlichia granulocytophila* is the agent of human granulocytic ehrlichiosis (HGE).

The use of new names and combinations not widely recognized for genera and species lends increasing confusion to a group of bacteria already in taxonomic disarray. Several other species names have been suggested for the HGE agent since the initial description of the clinical illness caused by this agent and the in vitro technique used to isolate the agent in blood samples (3,4). Both *E. phagocytophila* and *E. equi* are genetically nearly identical to the HGE agent, and the three are probably conspecific. Thus, most scientists in the field today would support use of the name *Ehrlichia phagocytophila* to describe these bacteria.

Recent phylogenetic analyses show that *E. phagocytophila* strains align into a clade that includes *Anaplasma marginale*, the historical precedent in this grouping. Such phylogenetic analyses, which are also supported by comparative antigenic and biological studies, have resulted in a proposal for reclassification of several *Ehrlichia* spp., including *E. phagocytophila*, into the genus *Anaplasma* (5). Until a cogent reclassification based on objective criteria is firmly accepted, the creation and use of new scientific name combinations for a single bacterium yield clinical and laboratory confusion and should be avoided.

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References

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